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ABSTRACT

The Missouri Excellence in Education Act (1985) requires the establishment of professional development programs for beginning teachers. By offering collegial support and practical assistance, these programs should help beginning teachers polish their skills, improve their chances for success, and encourage them to stay in the profession. As teacher shortages become a serious threat to education, mentoring programs offer a logical, relatively inexpensive approach to helping avoid this loss of potential. This paper describes the Ferguson-Florissant School District's four-phase plan to develop a successful program. In the first phase, the district's Human Resources Office, responsible for developing and implementing the program, sent all teachers an announcement brochure based on information gleaned from a literature review and discussions with new teachers. The brochure profiled the successful mentor, emphasized a strong trust and caring component, and listed expectations for program participants. A month following the brochure's distribution, 75 teachers had submitted applications accompanied by principal recommendations. As new teachers were hired, human resources staff worked with principals to assign mentors. Phase II involved preparation of the mentor handbook. In phase III, summer training sessions using role playing and brainstorming techniques were provided for mentor teachers. Phase IV involved three one-on-one followup sessions with the Human Resources Director. The program's success has spurred efforts to sponsor a peer analyis/coaching program for all interested district teachers. Included are three references. (MLH)

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MENTORING AND PEER COACHING: AN ACTION MODEL

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MENTORING AND PEER COACHING: AN ACTION MODEL

William S. Emrick

The Missouri Excellence in Education Act (1985) requires establishment of professional development programs specifically for beginning teachers who have no prior teaching experience. By offering collegial support and practical assistance, these programs should help beginning teachers polish their skills, improve their chances for success and encourage them to stay in the profession. According to law, school districts in Missouri must provide a professional development plan for each teacher without experience. This "beginning teacher support system" must include an entry year mentor program.

A RATIONALE FOR MENTORING NEW TEACHERS

The transition from student teacher to first year teacher can be a traumatic experience, one that has been labeled "reality shock." 1 Researchers find that most beginning teachers enter their first classrooms with idealistic and unrealistic expectations. Once they begin teaching, panic develops as they realize the extent of their responsibilities and the limitation of their skills. Along with the uncertainty of what to teach and how, they must make complex decisions about student discipline, motivation, individual differences, and classroom organization. They must also find the time to manage the routine yet critical

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tasks of determining room arrangement, locating materials, and learning scores of school procedures. Reluctant to ask questions that betray their ignorance, they frequently choose instead to muddle through, thus creating a sense of isolation and failure that all too often ends a career. 2

Our study of the literature regarding new teachers revealed some of the more discouraging trends regarding new teachers.

They include the following:

1. Nationwide, approximately 15 per cent of new teachers leave after the first year.

2. Forty to fifty per cent of those entering the teaching profession will leave during the first seven years and more than two-thirds of those will resign within the first four years of teaching.

3. The most academically able are among the first to leave education and are doing so in increasing numbers.

As teacher shortages become a more serious threat to quality education, mentoring programs offer a logical and relatively inexpensive approach to helping avoid this loss of potential. 3

Recent Missouri teacher certification policies reflect the mandate for mentoring; however, they do not dictate the format of a mentor program. Thus, each district has the flexibility to develop a program reflective of its own circumstances.

Prior to the September 1, 1988 effective date of the law's implementation, we, in the Ferguson-Florissant School District began a program of action designed to effect a successful mentoring experience.

PHASE I: SECURING MENTORS

The Human Resources Office had the responsibility for developing and implementing a mentoring program for new teachers. The text of the brochure that we distributed to all district teachers to announce and explain our mentoring program resulted from information gained from a review of the literature on mentoring programs as well as discussions with new teachers about their experiences. Both sources helped us in formulating our rationale and articulating the qualities we needed in our mentors and our expectations for their role.

In stating our goals for the mentor/new teacher relationship, we saw the mentoring program as an opportunity for professional growth for both parties. As a result of their participation, both would have special opportunities

for training in effective teaching practices and peer coaching.

In profiling the successful mentor, we explained that the mentor, a teacher with a minimum of five years of teaching experience, needed to be someone with good communication and interpersonal skills, a knowledge of current teaching/learning principles, and a knowledge of the policies and procedures of their building and the district. Above all, a mentor needed to being a caring individual with the desire to be a guide, a sponsor, a helper, a friend.

Paramount in the mentor/new teacher relationship is a feeling of trust and sharing. The mentor could begin building that relationship as well as help the new teacher make the complex adjustments to the job. In the brochure, we listed the following expectations for those who participated in the mentoring program:

1. Orient the new teacher to the building;
2. Review curriculum and text;
3. Assist in setting up and organizing the classroom;
4. Explain record keeping procedures;
5. Introduce the new teacher to the staff in the building;
6. Provide information about the community;
7. Plan and conduct periodic classroom observations with the new teacher;

8. Confer formally and informally with the new teacher on a regular basis;

9. Help plan an inservice program with the new teacher.

The brochure was distributed in May, 1988 and by the beginning of June, seventy-five teachers had submitted applications that were accompanied by principal recommendations. As new teachers were hired, we worked with the principals in assigning mentors.

PHASE II: PREPARATION OF THE MENTOR HANDBOOK

Mentoring is not a new concept. The term "mentor" comes from Greek mythology. Before leaving for the Trojan War, Odysseus placed his son, Telemachus, in the care of a man named "Mentor." During Odysseus's long absence, Mentor gave advice and guidance to Telemachus. The modern teacher mentor takes this same role. It is a role that encourages the new teacher and mentor to communicate freely and non-judgementally. It is an adult relationship where the new teacher's curiosity and desire to improve is supported and facilitated by the mentor's expertise.

While a number of our experienced teachers were eager to take on the role of mentor, we wanted to make sure that they had adequate training. One part of the training process was the development of a "Mentoring Handbook." The handbook was

meant to serve as a resource for mentor training before and during the school year, as a guide for the mentor in understanding his/her role, and as a reference for performance expectations in the mentor role. The handbook addressed the following topics:

1. A review of the Excellence in Education Act and Missouri's Teacher Certification Process;
2. Definitions and Goals of the Ferguson-Florissant Mentoring Program;
3. Descriptions of the New Teacher and Mentor Training;
4. Description of the Mentor's Role as Coach;
5. Preconference/Classroom Observation/Postconference Procedures and Guidelines ;
6. Sample Staff Development Plans;
7. Mentoring Case Studies.

The purpose of the handbook is to focus the mentors upon the role of coaching the new teacher during his/her first year and the procedures for carrying out that role. It explains how the mentor needs to reflect upon his/her own teaching practices and engage in an analysis of them before attempting to coach someone else. It further explains the steps in the coaching process-- one teacher observes another conduct a lesson, makes a record of the lesson that is revealing and convincing to the teacher, and then engages the teacher in an analysis of the lesson.

We stressesd that coaching depends on several conditions. Together, the mentor and new teacher need to be able to:

1. Create an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust;
2. Ensure that help is confidential;
3. Cope with day-to-day issues while maintaining a broad view of the total picture;
4. See an issue from different points of view;

Along with these, the mentor needs to be able to:

1. Perceive and articulate the new teacher's needs;
2. Facilitate a productive beginning of the school year;
3. Coach a new teacher through careful observation;
4. Become a role model for teaching excellence and human relations skills;
5. Motivate by providing the encouragement and impetus for the new teacher to act toward achievement of his/her professional goals;
6. Provide a safe environment where the new teacher can make mistakes without losing self-confidence.

These topics formed the basis of the training for mentors.

PHASE III: SUMMER TRAINING FOR MENTORS

In collaboration with the building principals, we assigned mentors to the new teachers as they were hired.

Each mentor contacted his/her new teacher to invite them to the two-day training period that was to be held the week before the district's Orientation Week. The mentors spent one of those two days with the new teacher. A small stipend was paid to both. Twenty-two teachers and their mentors participated.

Using the Mentor Handbook, the Human Reources Director trained the mentors in the process of peer analysis. Some generally accepted cognitive objectives outlined in the handbook for the mentors included the following:

1. Provide each other with the objective feedback on their lessons;
2. Provide each other with specific, requested feedback on their lessons;
3. Develop a precise vocabulary of instruction;
4. Develop multiple teaching techniques;
5. Develop and practice self-analysis and metacognition;
6. Discriminate between instructional precision and personal style;
7. Discuss the rationale behind instructional concepts and skills;
8. Develop the skill of analytical over judgemental observation.

These objectives focused the mentors' initial training

primarily on developing conferencing skills before their classroom observations of the new teacher, collecting effective data during the observation, and refining analysis of the lesson during a post observation conference.

The training emphasized that the preobservation conference is critical. It not only provides an opportunity to share the components of the lesson and the strategies to be employed, it also provides an opportunity for the teacher to rehearse or think through what is actually going to happen.

In the preobservation conference the mentor/coach and the new teacher together do the following:

1. Identify the nature of the lesson
2. Make the objective(s) explicit
3. Discuss what the teacher will be doing
4. Predict what the students will be doing
5. Consider specific problems or concerns that the teacher anticipates with the lesson
6. Select appropriate observation techniques or recording systems

Essentially, the preconference can become an advance organizer for the lesson.

The handbook lists guiding questions that elict information from the new teacher that help both of them

determine the most important parts of the lesson and its objectives, explain the strategies to be employed, make predictions about student behaviors and outcomes, select a data collection system and identify the role of the observer. The preobservation questions are as follows:

1. What is the lesson I'll be observing about?
2. What led to this lesson and what will follow?
3. What do you expect the students to learn in this lesson?
4. What strategies/techniques will you be using?
5. What sequence of activities will you follow in this lesson?
6. What specific observable behaviors can I expect to see?
7. What specific ways will you use to check on student understanding and learning during the lesson?
8. What, specifically, do you wish me to observe?
9. Are there any group or individual circumstances or characteristics of which I should be aware?

During the training, the mentors used the list of questions in a roleplaying activity that helped them practice the preconference behaviors.

The training also included the mentors brainstorming in small groups the behaviors of effective teaching. Their lists of effective behaviors were categorized into the

following groups:

GROUP I:

The teacher

1. exhibits high expectations for achievement
2. teaches the classroom as a whole
3. keeps the session task oriented
4. presents information or skills animatedly

GROUP II:

The teacher

1. gives examples and explains them.
2. writes important things on the chalkboard
3. relates what is being taught to real life
4. repeats questions and explanations if students don't understand

GROUP III:

The teacher

1. reacts consistently to student feelings and attitudes.
2. seems confident in teaching the subject and demonstrates grasp of it.
3. expresses a positive, pleasant, optimistic attitude and feelings.
4. encourages students to take responsibility for their own work.

GROUP IV:

The teacher

1. asks questions to find out if students understand

what has been taught.

2. lets students ask questions.
3. prepares students for lessons by reviewing, outlining, explaining objectives and summarizing.

GROUP V:

The teacher

1. demonstrates an effective lesson design (anticipatory set, objective(s), modeling, checks for understanding, guided practice, closure, independent practice).
2. provides clear transition signals.
3. exhibits clarity of instruction.
4. shows preparation for the lesson.
5. provides attention to summation.

They then began focusing on data collection procedures by watching a videotaped lesson. Each mentor recorded the data based on the group of effective teaching behavior(s) that he/she had chosen. At that point, the mentors compared their observations and participated in a joint analysis of the lesson. They determined, through consensus, that the post conference must accomplish the following:

1. It must provide the teacher with objective data that is accurate, clear to both parties, relevant to the agreed upon concerns, and interpretable in respect what changes are feasible and reasonable.
2. It must permit the teacher to analyze what was happening during the lesson as evidenced by the

data. The observer/coach clarifies the data.

3. It must allow the teacher to use the data to interpret his/her behavior and that of the students.
4. It must permit the teacher, with the assistance of the coach, to decide on alternative approaches for the future, attend to dissatisfactions with the observed teaching, or emphasize those aspects that were satisfying.

Their analyses became the data needed to practice the postobservation conference. Again, that part of the process was practiced through roleplaying activities using the following questions developed from analysis:

1. What are/were your observations of the students' activities/behavior?
2. How did what you observed your students doing compare with what you had planned for them to do?
3. What did you do that you believe caused your students to behave/perform that way?
4. The data collected is analyzed by the teacher and observer/coach.
5. How do you see the attainment of your objectives by the students?
6. If you were to repeat this lesson, would you do it the same way?

During the roleplaying, the mentors were alerted to the necessity of presenting the data in an objective, non-judgmental manner and of encouraging the new teacher to

analyze the data to assess the activities and outcomes of the lesson. This would then enable the new teacher to strategize about where to go from there. The mentors were trained to see the postc nference as the culminating activity of the peer analysis/coaching process and to recognize that the collaboration required would increase the probability of the success of the teaching experience for the new teacher and the professional growth of both participants.

PHASE IV: FOLLOW-UP

After the initial training in August, three one-on-one sessions with the Human Resources Director were scheduled for each mentor and each new teacher. During October, the Human Resources Director visited them in their buildings to check the new teacher's understanding of the handbook guidelines and of the district and building rules and procedures. He also reviewed the conference and observation process in the light of their first observations. The second trip in December or January involved his continuing to review the mentor's records from their conferences and observations. The third visit in April involved his concluding the the debriefing of six joint observations and accompanying conferences that had begun in the beginning of the school year.

SUMMARY

The understanding of the coaching process that we gained from our mentoring program in the 1988-89 school year will direct us in the future as we try to expand the opportunities to sponsor a peer analysis/ coaching programs for all interested teachers in the district. The increased sense of efficacy gained by both mentors and new teachers affirms for us that teachers in all ranges of experience need to work colleagially.

William S. Emrick is a former secondary school teacher and building administrator and is currently Director of Human Resources for the Ferguson-Florissant, Missouri schools. He serves as director of the district's mentoring program for the project described in this article.

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